

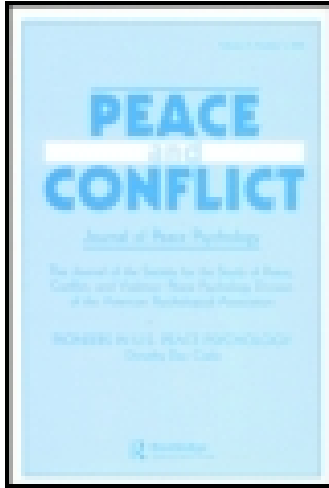
This article was downloaded by: [McMaster University]

On: 07 November 2014, At: 12:27

Publisher: Routledge

Informa Ltd Registered in England and Wales Registered Number: 1072954

Registered office: Mortimer House, 37-41 Mortimer Street, London W1T 3JH, UK



Peace and Conflict: Journal of Peace Psychology

Publication details, including instructions for authors and subscription information:

<http://www.tandfonline.com/loi/hpcn20>

Psychologists and Military Interrogators Rethink the Psychology of Torture

Jean Maria Arrigo^a & Richard V. Wagner^b

^a Project on Ethics and Art in Testimony

^b Bates College

Published online: 05 Dec 2007.

To cite this article: Jean Maria Arrigo & Richard V. Wagner (2007) Psychologists and Military Interrogators Rethink the Psychology of Torture, *Peace and Conflict: Journal of Peace Psychology*, 13:4, 393-398, DOI: [10.1080/10781910701665550](https://doi.org/10.1080/10781910701665550)

To link to this article: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/10781910701665550>

PLEASE SCROLL DOWN FOR ARTICLE

Taylor & Francis makes every effort to ensure the accuracy of all the information (the "Content") contained in the publications on our platform. However, Taylor & Francis, our agents, and our licensors make no representations or warranties whatsoever as to the accuracy, completeness, or suitability for any purpose of the Content. Any opinions and views expressed in this publication are the opinions and views of the authors, and are not the views of or endorsed by Taylor & Francis. The accuracy of the Content should not be relied upon and should be independently verified with primary sources of information. Taylor and Francis shall not be liable for any losses, actions, claims, proceedings, demands, costs, expenses, damages, and other liabilities whatsoever or howsoever caused arising directly or indirectly in connection with, in relation to or arising out of the use of the Content.

This article may be used for research, teaching, and private study purposes. Any substantial or systematic reproduction, redistribution, reselling, loan, sub-licensing, systematic supply, or distribution in any form to anyone is expressly forbidden. Terms & Conditions of access and use can be found at <http://www.tandfonline.com/page/terms-and-conditions>

Psychologists and Military Interrogators Rethink the Psychology of Torture

Jean Maria Arrigo

Project on Ethics and Art in Testimony

Richard V. Wagner

Bates College

Torture interrogation does not yield reliable information. The popular belief that “torture works” conflicts with effective non-abusive methodologies of interrogation and with fundamental tenets of psychology. These were the conclusions reached at a meeting of recently retired, senior U.S. Army interrogators and research psychologists who met to rethink the psychology of torture. This article introduces the military interrogators, the psychologists, and the themes explored. In the process, this article explains why competent interrogators do not require a definition of torture, discredits the “ticking bomb scenario,” and outlines the studies that comprise the meeting report, *Torture is for Amateurs*.

The popular belief that “torture works” conflicts with effective non-abusive methodologies of interrogation and with fundamental tenets of psychology. These were the conclusions of four recently retired, senior U.S. Army interrogators and seven research psychologists who met in November 2006 for the Seminar for Psychologists and Interrogators on Rethinking the Psychology of Torture, under the auspices of Psychologists for Social Responsibility and the Department of Psychology, Georgetown University.

THE INTERROGATORS AND THE PSYCHOLOGISTS

One of the seminar interrogators initiated the project at hand through an anonymous audiotaped invitation to psychologists at the 2006 Convention of the

American Psychological Association (Bennett, 2006). He and his colleagues anticipated that a psychological formulation of their knowledge of non-abusive interrogation protocols would better communicate with the general public and government authorities who have failed to seek the counsel of senior interrogators. In July 2006, just prior to the convention, 20 other military interrogators had sent a similar message to the U.S. House Committee on the Armed Services (Bauer, 2006):

[T]rained and experienced interrogators refute the assertion that so-called “coercive interrogation techniques” and torture are necessary to win the “War on Terror.” Trained and experienced interrogators can, in fact, accomplish the intelligence gathering mission using only those techniques, developed and proven effective over decades, found in the Army Field Manual 34-52 (1992). You will also see that experienced interrogators find prisoner/detainee abuse and torture to be counter-productive to the intelligence gathering mission.

The seminar interrogators were veterans of the first Gulf War and the current war in Iraq, as well as of wars in Vietnam, Grenada, Bosnia, and Kosovo. For example, one said that during the Gulf War he would screen hundreds of prisoners from among the 4,000 or so processed daily. All of the seminar interrogators had extensive backgrounds as trainers of interrogators and directors of interrogation training programs. One had also helped to develop the U.S. Army Survival, Evasion, Resistance, and Escape (SERE) program, which trains select military personnel to resist torture interrogation if captured. The identities of the seminar interrogators are archived with seminar materials in the *Intelligence Ethics Collection*, Hoover Institution Archives, Stanford University (Arrigo, 2007).

The seven participating psychologists came from the fields of social, cognitive, forensic, cultural, political, and peace psychology. Two concerns motivated the seminar psychologists. First, there is a scarcity of pertinent psychological knowledge to inform the public debate on the ethics of torture interrogation of terrorist suspects. Research psychologists can contribute relevant data collection, analysis, and theory. The qualitative data on hostile interrogations provided by the seminar interrogators were among the best psychological data available to outsiders, given the constraints of military secrecy and research ethics. Second, American psychology, as the major national influence in world psychology, bears an obligation to evaluate torture interrogation, which American foreign policy has brought to the fore. Seminar psychologists understood evaluation to include individual beliefs about torture interrogation, organizational supports, and social dynamics, in addition to the interaction between interrogator and interrogatee.

DEFINITION OF INTERROGATION AND NON-DEFINITION OF TORTURE

The seminar interrogators wholly agreed on the definition of *interrogation* as “the manner of extracting a maximum amount of accurate information from a detainee in a minimum amount of time, using legal means” (Arrigo, 2007). If the source is present by choice and is willing to talk, then the event is a *debriefing*, not an interrogation. The difference is in the relationship between the interrogator and source, and the interrogation environment.

Coercion was variously characterized as (a) the implication that “if you don’t cooperate something bad will happen to you”; (b) “active efforts to influence or manipulate you,” whether through persuasion, trickery, or force; and (c) “forcing you to do something against your will (Arrigo, 2007). Hostile interrogations are necessarily coercive to some extent, whether or not abusive, because detainees are held against their will.

One interrogator defined *torture* as an extreme degree of coercion, at the point where the interrogator’s intervention damages the detainee’s physical or physiological processes, as in sleep deprivation. In a press conference after the seminar, when challenged by a journalist for a sharp definition of torture, another interrogator explained that a sharp definition was unimportant to him: “All these environmental pressures on the detainee—I don’t need them for a successful interrogation. So why even have the argument?” (Arrigo, 2007).

The seminar psychologists similarly do not pursue the definition of torture in the articles that follow but use the terms *coercion*, *abuse*, and *torture* loosely.

THE ALTERNATIVE TO ABUSIVE INTERROGATIONS

A common argument for torture is the “ticking time-bomb” scenario in which a terrorist who knows the location of a time-bomb is tortured in a race to save a multitude of innocents. The seminar interrogators stated that this scenario is based on a misunderstanding of the nature of terrorist investigations. It is highly unlikely that investigators would have all the pieces of the puzzle except the location of the bomb. In their combined experience, the seminar interrogators had never encountered a true ticking bomb scenario. In any case, the terrorist in the scenario as premised knows that he only has to keep his secret for the short time period until the bomb detonates. Moreover, torture interrogation offers the terrorist a prime opportunity to deceive interrogators by falsely naming bomb locations of difficult access. In a high-stakes, bad-bet situation of this sort, they would resort to their best, deeply relational interrogation techniques, not squander the fragile opportunity through torture.

However, what is the alternative to abusive interrogations? Over a period of 3 days, the seminar interrogators presented a recent history of military interrogation; an overview of the major training program for interrogators, the standard non-abusive approaches to interrogation, which exclude torture; and individual examples of interrogations. As one psychologist exclaimed in a moment of insight, "It's all just social psychology!"—persuasion, conformity, social modeling, etc.—dressed in military terminology, of course (see McCauley, this issue). The catch is that the non-abusive techniques require linguistic expertise, cultural sensitivity, situational awareness, flexible thinking, self-mastery, and capacity to empathize with foreigners and enemies. These skills—the product of high aptitude, much training, and long mentorship—contrast with the ignorance, bigotry, and lack of emotional control that can accompany abusive techniques.

OUTLINE OF THE ARTICLES CONSTITUTING THE SEMINAR REPORT

The seminar report published here opens with two articles that summarize and interpret narrative data presented by the seminar interrogators. Clark McCauley leads off with a review of psychological theory and research embodied in the non-abusive techniques described by seminar interrogators. His review focuses especially on the interrogator–source relationship. He applies group dynamics and social comparison theory in his analysis of that relationship and of the interrogation techniques described in the U.S. Army Field Manual 2-22.3 for Human Intelligence Collector Operations. McCauley concludes with an application of French and Raven's (1960) bases of social power and Fiske's (1991) theory of social models.

Shifting to the organizational level, Jean Maria Arrigo and Ray Bennett (one of the seminar interrogators) examine structural and procedural supports for abusive interrogations in the U.S. military. Their analysis points to non-obvious organizational changes needed for support of non-abusive interrogations.

Allison Redlich then distinguishes military intelligence interrogation from police interrogation and summarizes common problems in obtaining accurate information through abusive interrogation techniques.

The next two articles address the societal context. Ronnie Janoff-Bulman endeavors to explain the folk psychology of popular belief in the effectiveness of torture interrogation, despite contrary evidence. In her analysis, she draws principally on social cognitive biases that can sustain policies supportive of abusive interrogation and attempts to discredit those practices. Fathali Moghaddam describes how intergroup conflict and political opportunism can drive a public policy of torture interrogation. He further calls on American psychology to recognize and take responsibility for its major influence on the position of international psychology with respect to torture interrogation.

For a comprehensive view, Robin Vallacher integrates individual, group, and societal aspects of torture interrogation in a dynamical systems model. His model indicates how we might reverse the proliferating harms of torture interrogation in a “high temperature” society at war.

Finally, Richard Wagner assesses the extent to which the psychologists have promoted the interrogators’ goal of convincing authorities that abusive interrogation must cease, and draws implications for the field of psychology, its theory, research, and practice.

BIOGRAPHICAL NOTES

Jean Maria Arrigo, is a social psychologist and oral historian. She established the *Ethics of Intelligence and Weapons Development Oral History Collection* at Bancroft Library, University of California at Berkeley and the *Intelligence Ethics Collection* at Hoover Institution Archives, Stanford University. In collaboration with theater directors and performers she has brought these materials to broader audiences.

Richard Wagner is editor of *Peace and Conflict: Journal of Peace Psychology*, a retired professor of psychology at Bates College, and from 2006 through 2008 a legislator in the Maine House of Representatives. He is co-editor (with Daniel J. Christie and Deborah DuNann Winter) of *Peace, Conflict, and Violence: Peace Psychology for the 21st Century*.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

We are grateful to the David and Carol Myers Foundation for funding the seminar. Interrogator Ray Bennett recruited the interrogators. Richard Wagner recruited the research psychologists and served as program co-chair. Jean Maria Arrigo served as the liaison between interrogators and psychologists and as program co-chair. Colleen Cordes, Executive Director of Psychologists for Social Responsibility, administered the event. Fathali Moghaddam hosted the seminar at the Department of Psychology, Georgetown University, Washington, DC.

REFERENCES

- Arrigo, J. M. (2007). Seminar for Psychologists and Interrogators on Rethinking the Psychology of Torture, November 10–12, 2006, Psychologists for Social Responsibility and Georgetown University, Washington, D. C. *Intelligence Ethics Collection*, Hoover Institution Archives, Stanford University. Includes original Seminar materials, notes of the proceedings with interrogators’ comments

and corrections, and an oral history of interrogator Ray Bennett (pseudonym). The identities of the interrogators and some materials are restricted until January 1, 2020.

Bauer, P. (2006, July 31). Statement on interrogation practices to the House Committee on the Armed Services. (Online) Retrieved May 28, 2007, from http://www.amnestyusa.org/denounce_torture/statement_on_interrogation.pdf

Bennett, R. (pseudonym). (2006, August). Interrogator's request to professional psychologists. In J. M. Arrigo (Ed.), *Visible remedies for invisible settings and sources of torture* American Psychological Association annual convention, New Orleans, LA.

Fiske, A. P. (1991). *Structures of social life: The four elementary forms of human relations*. New York: Free Press (Macmillian).

French, J. P. R., Jr., & Raven, B. (1960). The bases of social power. In D. Cartwright & A. Zander (Eds.), *Group dynamics* (pp. 607–623). New York: Harper & Row.

U. S. Army Headquarters. (2006). Field Manual 2-22.3 Human Intelligence Collector Operations. Washington, D. C.: Author. Available at <http://fas.org/irp/doddir/army/fm2-22-3.pdf>